



# Newsletter

## Lower Clark Fork Valley Trail Study

Spring 2003

### Introduction and Background

This is the third in a series of newsletters designed to inform and engage you in the planning process that is looking at opportunities for trails in the lower Clark Fork valley. The idea for a trail project originated as part of the consultation process among Avista Corporation and 26 organizations during a four-year planning process to collaboratively develop the Clark Fork Settlement Agreement as part of the relicensing of two hydroelectric projects on the lower Clark Fork River. The Clark Fork Settlement Agreement calls for the implementation of the Recreation Resource Management Plan, which is to be used by the stakeholders to guide recreation management and development along the lower Clark Fork corridor into the future. One item identified in the Recreation Resource Management Plan was the need for a trail feasibility study to look at opportunities for trails and trail improvements along the Clark Fork from Thompson Falls, Montana to Clark Fork, Idaho.



The advisory committee brainstorming ideas for trail concepts and guidelines at the April meeting.

The Avista Corporation together with a citizen advisory committee of dedicated volunteers, is in the process of developing a final trail concept plan for the lower Clark Fork valley. Additional assistance is being provided by the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTCA)

Program of the National Park Service. The citizen advisory committee represents a broad cross-section of the valley including elected officials, government agencies, chambers of commerce, adjacent landowners, clubs, organizations, schools, and local citizens.

The goal of the planning

process is to complete a final conceptual plan that identifies trail opportunities from Thompson Falls, Montana to Clark Fork, Idaho. Project planning began in October, 2001, and is being completed in the following three stages:

- Information Gathering (January – May 2002)
- Analysis and Field Investigation (Summer 2002)
- Plan Production, Public Review and Adoption (Fall 2002 – Summer 2003)



### Check it out...

Do you want to see the complete draft plan? The draft trail plan is available and you can pick one up at the Avista Noxon Resource Office, Thompson Falls Library or the Sanders County Courthouse. Please call (406) 847-2729 for more info.

### Keep in mind,

The draft plan is a conceptual document. There will be issues that arise and details that must be worked out prior to implementation. And of course public support and available funding will help determine what gets built and when.

## Planning Update

We are currently in the third stage of the planning process. The planning team (Avista and RTCA) has been working with the advisory committee to draft and develop a vision statement, trail design guidelines, information on the natural and cultural resources in the area, ideas for management and maintenance, interpretive and educational opportunities, and implementation and prioritization of trail opportunities. These ideas began to give shape to a shared vision for the system of trails concept. Two public meetings/open houses were held in June 2002 (one in Thompson Falls, Montana and one in Clark Fork, Idaho) to solicit input and participation on the trail concepts from residents in the corridor. Armed with the concepts developed by the Advisory Committee and the input received from the public meetings, the planning team initiated fieldwork to identify potential trail routes. Ideas for trail opportunities emerged and the planning team then prepared a draft concept plan that included a list of trail segments. Two public meetings were held in March 2003 to solicit comments from the public on the draft plan. This newsletter is primarily dedicated to summarizing the trail segments identified in the draft document.

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## The Lower Clark Fork System of Trails

### *Vision Statement*

*The lower Clark Fork trail system will become a quality regional resource that enriches the lives of residents and visitors and fosters a sense of community. This system of recreational trails allows people to experience the rural and rustic environment, while preserving the corridor for the next generation's enjoyment.*



View of the Blue Slide from the Blue Slide Road

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### Trail Types

The lower Clark Fork trail system is envisioned to consist of a number of trail segments that have varying degrees of development, surfacing, location, setting, and levels of accessibility that support diverse uses. The trails were categorized into three trail types.

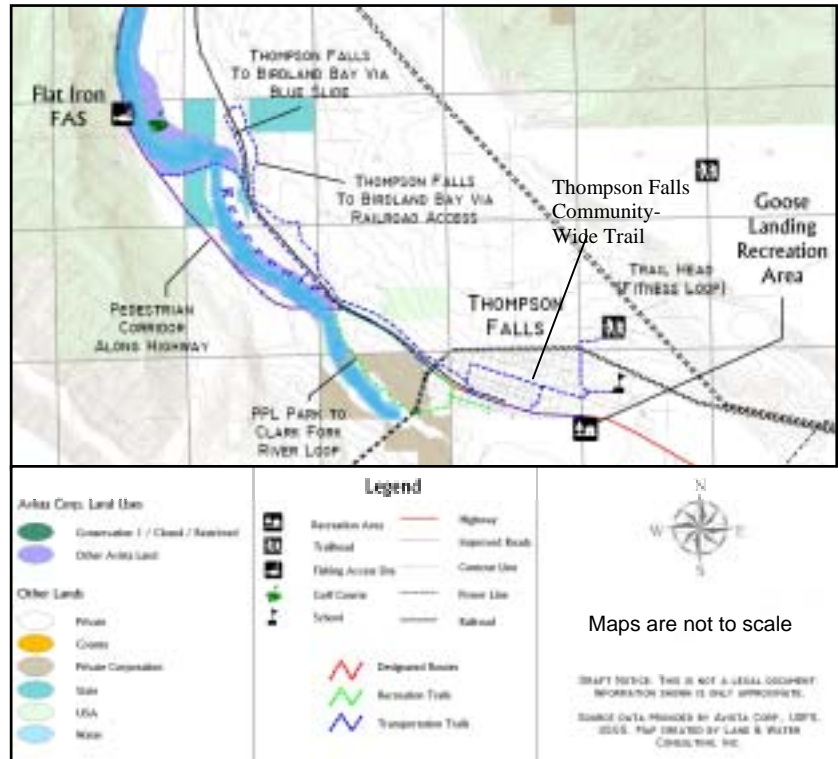
- (1) **Pedestrian linkage/transportation** trails are multi-use trails mainly alongside existing road corridors. The primary purpose of this trail type is to provide safe pedestrian transportation connections.
- (2) **Designated routes** involve designating and signing routes along existing roads and streets. A key component of this trail type is signing routes along existing roads for bicycle/pedestrian safety and route finding purposes.
- (3) **Recreation trails** is the last trail type. There are four sub-categories of recreation trails: 1) multi-use trails; 2) horseback riding staging areas; 3) nature trails; and 4) water trails.
  - *Multi-use trails* will be designed for a diverse group of recreation users including hikers, bicyclists, joggers, rollerbladers, and in some cases snowmobiles, equestrians, and wheelchairs.
  - *Nature trails* are short loop hiking trails that are located in settings that are suitable for wildlife viewing, interpretation, and education.
  - The *equestrian staging areas* category involves developing trailhead staging areas designed to accommodate horse trailers and located in areas where equestrians can easily access existing Forest Service trails.
  - *Water trails* are designated routes over water for recreational canoers and kayakers. This involves development of shoreline staging areas for launching, beaching, portaging, picnicking, and overnight camping.

## Trail Opportunities

One goal of the trail plan is to provide close-to-home trail opportunities for each of the communities in the valley. The following describes the proposed trail segments near or in the five communities in the lower Clark Fork area.

### Thompson Falls

- **PPL Park to Clark Fork River Loop:** A paved loop trail from the PPL Island Park along Maiden Lane to PPL Power Park, then along the Clark Fork River to the Highway 200 bridge, and back to town along side the highway. This trail also includes rehabilitating the bridge from the Island Park to the south side of the river.
- **Thompson Falls to Birdland Bay Bridge via Blue Slide:** A hard surfaced loop trail, about six miles long, from Thompson Falls along side highway 200 to the Blue Slide Road. The path would follow the Blue Slide Road to Birdland Bay Bridge and then back out to highway 200 to Thompson Falls. A spur trail could lead to Flat Iron Recreation Area.
- **Thompson Falls to Birdland Bay Bridge via the Railroad Access Road:** This route is a potential alternative route to the trail described above. It is a six-mile long trail along the railroad access road that connects to Preston Road back to Thompson Falls (instead of highway 200).
- **Thompson Falls Community Trail:** This involves creating a system of sidewalks, trails, and safe crossings that connect the existing fitness trail, Thompson Falls High School, neighborhoods, and businesses on Main Street.



*Proposed Trails near Thompson Falls*

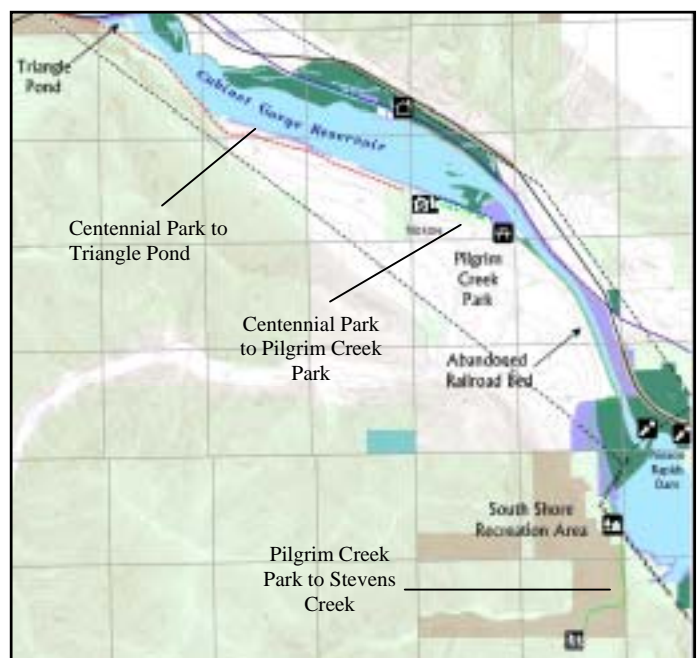
*Note: The legend above applies to all the maps.*

### Trout Creek

- **Trout Creek Community-Wide Trail:** This involves creating a system of sidewalks, trails, and safe crossings that connect the business district, the senior center, school, the fairgrounds and the Trout Creek Recreation area.

### Noxon

- **Centennial Park to Pilgrim Creek:** This route is a paved trail about 1 mile long, on the abandoned railroad from Centennial Park in



*Proposed Trails near Noxon*



Noxon to Pilgrim Creek Park.

- *Centennial Park to Triangle Pond:* This route is a continuation of the route described above. This paved 3.5 miles long trail would continue west from Centennial Park to Triangle Pond along side of the County road.
- *Pilgrim Creek Park to Stevens Creek:* Dual pathways (paved and unpaved) are envisioned continuing east from Pilgrim Creek Park along the abandoned railroad grade to good viewpoints of Noxon Dam and continuing on to the South Shore dispersed area to Forest Road #2746 and up to Stevens Creek, about 9 miles long.

### Heron

- *Heron Community-Wide Trail:* This involves creating a system of sidewalks, trails, and safe crossings that connect Heron's community center, the two park parcels, other recreation areas, and local businesses.
- *Heron to Quinn's Cut:* A signed and designated bicycle loop along existing county roads from Heron to Quinn's Cut and back on the upper river road, approximately 9 miles.
- *Heron – Lower River Road Loop:* A



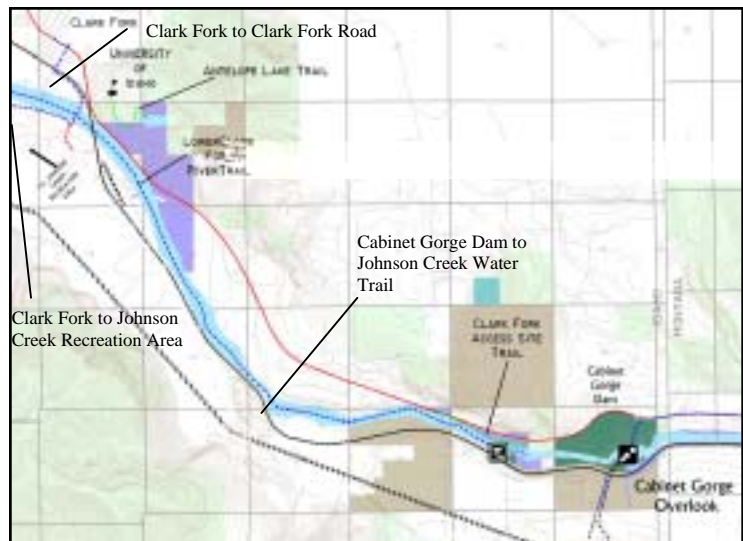
*Proposed Trails near Heron*

signed and designated bicycle loop from Heron to the lower river road that then loops

back on the Clark Fork County Road. There are several connections that can be made with a variety of total distances ranging from about 7 to 11 miles.

### Clark Fork

- *Clark Fork to Clark Fork Road:* A trail or system of sidewalks from the town of Clark Fork to Clark Fork Road. The town of Clark Fork is proposing building a new vehicle bridge and then using the existing vehicle bridge for pedestrian use. This trail would access the proposed pedestrian bridge.
- *Clark Fork to the Johnson Creek Recreation Area:* A signed and designated bicycle route along existing roads on the south side of the river to the Johnson Creek Recreation Area.
- *University of Idaho to Antelope Lake:* Trail connection from the University of to Antelope Lake via the U.S. Forest Service trail. Trail work may include improved maintenance, signage, and a map that identifies the trail route.



*Proposed Trails near Clark Fork*

Another goal of the trail plan is to provide long and corridor wide trail opportunities for diverse uses and purposes including pedestrian transportation and recreation. The following proposed trail routes describe long or corridor-wide opportunities.

### Corridor-wide or Long Routes

- *Highway 200 Bike Path:* A long term vision that could take decades to complete is a separate, paved pedestrian corridor along side highway 200 from Thompson Falls to the Clark Fork Access Site,

approximately 56 miles. This trail would also connect to the County Road Bicycle Route from Thompson Falls to Clark Fork through the town of Heron.

- *County Road Bicycle Route:* A signed and designated bicycle route along existing county roads from Thompson Falls, Montana to Clark Fork, Idaho, approximately 65 miles. The route would use the Clark Fork County Road in Clark

Fork and then cross over to the Blue Slide Road and follow this to Thompson Falls.

- *Thompson Falls to Graves Creek:* A signed and designated route from Thompson Falls to Blue Slide Road and then to Forest Service – Graves Creek Road, about 7 miles. This route extends another 2 miles to the Graves Creek Falls Overlook.
- *Snowmobile Opportunity:* Create awareness of the snowmobile opportunities in the Minton Peak – Bloom Peak area and in the Marten Creek – Bottle Peak area. Snowmobilers using these areas can tie into over a hundred miles of groomed and ungroomed trails. Work under this opportunity may include building a warming hut and/or improving parking.
- *Cabinet-Noxon Water Trail:* A water trail is envisioned along both the Noxon and Cabinet Gorge reservoirs. A map of the trail would be developed that designates put in and take out sites, campsites, and public areas to portage around the dams.
- *Cabinet Gorge Dam to Johnson Creek Water Trail:* This trail opportunity consists of promoting and signing a water trail along the lower Clark Fork River from just below Cabinet Gorge Dam to Johnson Creek Recreation Area.



Bicyclists riding along Highway 200. A pedestrian transportation trail is proposed along side Highway 200

An additional goal of the trail plan is to provide trail routes that meet the needs of a diverse set of trail users and also provide residents and children educational and interpretive opportunities. The following describes the remaining recreation trails that meet this goal.

#### Additional Recreation Trails

- *Finley Flats:* An unpaved hiking, interpretive and watchable wildlife loop trail is envisioned here. Finley Flats is managed for fish and wildlife resources. There are excellent views of the Blue Slide from Finley Flats and this unique geologic feature could also be interpreted.
- *Bull River:* There is an opportunity for a short interpretive loop trail in the U.S. Forest Service Bull River day-use area.
- *Vermilion Creek Road:* A horseback riding staging area could be established near the intersection of Blue Slide Road and Vermilion Creek Road to encourage connection with the Forest Service trails.
- *Marten Creek Bay:* There is potential to build a trailhead that would accommodate horse trailers in the Marten Creek Bay area. This would allow access to and encourage use of several Forest Service trails and roads in this area. This trailhead could potentially also be used by snowmobiles in the winter.
- *Big Eddy:* A one-mile long, hard surfaced trail along the reservoir east of the U.S.F.S Big Eddy Recreation Area to Highway 200. This trail provides great views of the reservoir for hikers, joggers, and bicyclists.
- *Clark Fork Access Site:* After the highway is moved, there is an opportunity for a trail starting at the Clark Fork access site downstream of Cabinet Gorge Dam. The trail would go upstream approximately one mile along Avista property.



Artist rendering of the Finley Flats interpretive trail.

## What's Next?

The planning and advisory teams want to hear what you think about our draft trail concept plan. The draft plan was released at the public meetings on March 14th in Thompson Falls and March 15th in Heron. For more detailed information, copies of the draft plan are available for review at the Avista's Noxon Resource Office, Thompson Falls Library or the Sanders County Courthouse.

Following is a summary of next steps to complete the final trail concept plan for the Lower Clark Fork Valley:

- All comments on the draft plan are due to Brian Burky, Avista, on April 11.
- Revise plan based on input received from the public – April/May 2003
- Print and Produce Final Plan – May/June 2003
- Public Celebration – National Trails Day – June 2003

The final plan will be at a conceptual level. Additional planning, permitting, design, and engineering will be needed to determine if specific trail segments are feasible. Avista is the lead organization in this trail planning effort and has a modest amount of funding for trail implementation. However, Avista does not have funding to implement all of the trail opportunities identified. Avista is committed to completing the planning process and to seek grants and partnerships to help fund, build, and manage these remarkable opportunities for trails in the lower Clark Fork Valley, but they can not do it alone. Several potential partners and volunteer groups have been identified to enhance a collaborative effort to build and take care of the trail system. If you would like to participate in this effort, please contact Brian Burky at Avista Corporation.

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### Lower Clark Fork Valley Newsletter



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For more information, or to have your name added or deleted to the mailing list for future newsletters, please call the Avista offices.

Avista Corporation  
P.O. Box 1469  
Noxon, MT 59853  
(406) 847 2729

**To:**